

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims, in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Previously presented) A hot-fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing packaged, composite, cohesive food portions comprising at least nut butter and jelly wrapped in a flexible film, the process comprising the steps of:

(a) simultaneously and separately pumping the nut butter and jelly to an extrusion location;

(b) simultaneously and separately extruding the nut butter and jelly and longitudinally enclosing the extruded nut butter and jelly in a tubular web of the flexible film in the vertical form and fill machine,

wherein sugar syrup is added to the nut butter just prior to extruding the nut butter and jelly;

(c) combining the nut butter and jelly into composite predetermined food portions using a portion control method that varies an extrusion speed based on an amount of the nut butter and jelly present, wherein the nut butter and jelly within the predetermined food portions are in physical contact with each other; and

(d) sealing the composite predetermined food portions within the flexible film,

wherein a differential water activity of the nut butter and the jelly within the flexible film is less than about 0.5, and

wherein the nut butter and jelly maintain their individual product identity in the flexible film and are cohesive and manually removeable as a composite from the flexible film.

2. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the water activity of at least one of the nut butter and jelly is modified in a predetermined manner by the addition of sugar.

3. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the composite predetermined food portions comprise food slices which are sufficiently cohesive to permit manual removal of the food slices from the sealed wrapper while retaining textural and shape characteristics of the slices.

4. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the composite predetermined food portions are hermetically sealed within their wrappers.

5. (Previously presented) The process of claim 1 further comprising forming slices after sealing the composite predetermined food portions.

6. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the jelly comprises first and second thickeners, the first thickener causing the jelly to have a viscosity of less than about 5,000 centipoise during its extrusion, and the second thickener causing the jelly to have a viscosity of greater than about 100,000 centipoise following extrusion of the jelly and after setting of the second thickener.

7. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the water activity of the jelly is reduced by the addition of the sugar syrup.

8. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the water activity of the nut butter is increased by the addition of the sugar syrup.

9. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein a hard fat is added to the nut butter.

10. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the nut butter comprises, by weight, about 50-90% peanut butter; about 1-40% peanut flour; about 0.5-5% stabilizer; about 0-10% sucrose; and about 0-2% salt.

11. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 5 1, wherein the nut butter comprises, by weight, about 40-85% peanut butter; about 0-10% peanut flour; about 0-10% maltodextrin; about 0-40% corn syrup; about 0.5 5.0% stabilizer; about 0.5-4.0% emulsifier; about 0.1-3.0% salt; about 0-35% fructose; about 0-20% dextrose; and about 0-40% water.

12. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the jelly comprises, by weight, about 5-20% fruit juice; about 0.5-5 % high methoxyl pectin; about 0.5-5% low methoxyl pectin; about 0.1-3% acidulants; and about 0-2.5% vegetable oil.

13. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein the jelly comprises, by weight, about 5-20% fruit juice; about 20-40% corn syrup; about 15-35% fructose; about 5-20% dextrose; about 0.25-4.0% konjac flour; about 0.05-2.0% carrageenan; about 0.5-4.0% high methoxyl pectin; about 0.1-3.0% citric acid; and about 0-2.5% vegetable oil.

14. (Previously presented) A hot fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing a packaged, composite food portion comprising at least nut butter and jelly wrapped in a flexible film, the process comprising the steps of:

(a) simultaneously and separately pumping the nut butter and jelly to an extrusion location, and simultaneously and separately extruding nut butter and jelly through two or more generally planar-shaped extrusion nozzles and combining them into a composite food portion,

wherein the nut butter and jelly within the composite food portion retain their individual product identity, and

wherein sugar syrup is added to the nut butter just prior to extrusion;

(b) longitudinally wrapping the food portion in a tubular web of the flexible film using the vertical form and fill machine;

(c) forming the tubular web and the composite food portion into a slice shaped body using one or more flattening devices;

(d) briefly maintaining separation of the nut butter and jelly following extrusion and prior to forming the tubular web into the slice shaped body using one or more divider plates; and

(e) sealing the slice shaped body within the flexible film such that the nut butter and jelly are in physical contact with each other to provide a laminate food slice,

wherein differential water activity of the nut butter and the jelly within the laminate food slice is less than about 0.5, and

wherein the nut butter and the jelly maintain their individual product identity and are sufficiently cohesive to permit manual removal of the laminate food slice from the wrapper while substantially retaining textural and shape characteristics of the laminate food slice.

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 14, wherein the one or more divider plates comprise plates coated with a substance having a low coefficient of friction.

17. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 16, wherein the one or more divider plates comprise plates coated with Teflon®.

18. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein sealing the composite predetermined food portions comprises forming food slices which are

continuously sealed and wrapped at a rate in excess of 300 slices/minute at a single-lane machine.

19. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 18, wherein forming food slices comprises continuously sealing and wrapping at a rate in excess of 700 slices/minute.

20. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 18, wherein forming food slices comprises continuously sealing and wrapping at a rate in excess of 1,000 slices/minute.

21. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein using a portion control method comprises using sensing mechanisms to maintain or regulate weights of the nut butter and jelly.

22. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein using a portion control method comprises maintaining the amounts of the nut butter and jelly within the composite predetermined food portion within predetermined ratios.

23. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 21, wherein using sensing mechanisms comprises using one or more of the following: mass flow meters, transducers and level sensors.

24. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, further comprising the step of heating the nut butter and jelly into a soft, molten mass prior to their extrusion.

25. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein combining the nut butter and jelly comprises orienting the nut butter and jelly in an alternating, generally stripe shaped pattern within the composite predetermined food portions.

26. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, further comprising providing a plurality of adjacent extrusion nozzles.

27. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, further comprising providing two or more concentric extrusion tubes for extruding the nut butter and jelly in a variegated format.

28. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein sealing the composite predetermined food portions comprises forming food portions having a refrigerated shelf life of greater than about six months.

29. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, further comprising the step of cooling the composite predetermined food portions following extrusion.

30. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 5, wherein forming slices comprises forming slices in which the hardness of the nut butter within the slices is in the range of about 0.25-4.0 Kg/cm² at 43EF.

31. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 5, wherein forming slices comprises forming slices in which the hardness of the jelly within the slices is in the range of about 0.25-4.0 Kg/cm² at 43EF.

32. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, further comprising the step of separately mixing ingredients for the nut butter and jelly prior to the simultaneously and separately pumping the nut butter and jelly.

33. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 10, wherein a nut component of the nut butter is created by combining nut flour with an edible oil.

34. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 6, wherein at least one of the first and second thickeners ~~each~~ comprises a gel.

35. (Canceled)

36. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein sealing the composite predetermined food portions comprises forming wrapped food portions in which one of the nut butter or jelly completely surrounds the other within the wrapped food portion.

37. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein combining the nut butter and jelly into composite predetermined food portions comprises forming food portions that are consumable immediately following extrusion.

38. (Currently amended) A fluid fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing and packaging composite food portions comprising at least nut butter and jelly wrapped in a flexible film, the process comprising the steps of:

- (a) heating at least one of the nut butter and jelly to a soft, molten mass while maintaining at least one of the nut butter and jelly in a liquid state;
- (b) separately pumping each of the nut butter and jelly to an extrusion location;
- (c) adding sugar syrup to the nut butter just prior to extrusion;
- (d) extruding the nut butter and jelly and combining them into a composite food portion using a portion control method that varies an extrusion speed based on an amount of the food portion present, wherein the nut butter and jelly are in physical contact with each other yet maintain their individual product identity;
- (e) enclosing the ~~nut butter and jelly~~ composite food portion within the flexible film using the vertical form and fill machine; and
- (f) hermetically sealing the nut butter and jelly within a package of the flexible film having hermetic longitudinal seals and a hermetic cross-seal,

wherein the differential water activity of the nut butter and the jelly within the package is less than about 0.5 and the nut butter and the jelly are cohesive and manually removable from the package as a composite.

39. (Cancelled)

40. (Previously presented) A process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing and packaging nut butter and jelly in a flexible film, the process comprising the steps of

(a) separately heating and mixing each of the nut butter and jelly into a liquefied mixtures, and adding sugar syrup to the nut butter;

(b) separately delivering each of the liquefied nut butter and jelly to an extrusion location;

(c) coextruding the nut butter and jelly so that each is combined into a predetermined, composite food portion using the vertical form and fill machine in which the nut butter and jelly are in physical contact with each other, using a portion control method that varies an extrusion speed based on an amount of the food portion present, while permitting the nut butter and jelly within the food portion to maintain their individual product identity,

wherein the sugar syrup is added to the nut butter just prior to extrusion;

(d) converting the food portion into a generally slice-shaped food slices, wherein the food slices are sufficiently cohesive to permit manual removal of the food slices from the flexible film while substantially retaining their textural and shape characteristics of the composite food portion;

(e) wrapping the food slices within the flexible film; and

(f) sealing the food slices within the flexible film,

wherein a differential water activity of the nut butter and the jelly within the flexible film is less than about 0.5 and the food slices are cohesive and manually removable from the flexible film as the composite food portion.

41.-59. (Cancelled)

60. (Currently amended) A fluid fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing a composite food portion comprising nut butter and jelly in a flexible film, wherein the nut butter and jelly maintain their individual product identity, the process comprising the steps of:

- (a) preparing the nut butter and jelly;
- (b) separately delivering the nut butter and jelly to an extrusion

location;

- (c) continuously coextruding the nut butter and jelly and combining them into a predetermined amount ~~of~~ to form the composite food portion using a portion control method that varies the extrusion speed based on an amount of the composite food portion present, while permitting the nut butter and jelly within the composite food portion to maintain their individual product identity,

wherein the sugar syrup is added to the nut butter just prior to extruding the nut butter and jelly;

- (d) briefly maintaining separation of the nut butter and jelly following extrusion using one or more divider plates; and

- (e) enclosing the composite food portion using the vertical form and fill machine, such that the nut butter and jelly are in physical contact with each other within the flexible film,

wherein a differential water activity of the nut butter and the jelly within the ~~tubular web~~ flexible film is less than about 0.5; and

- (f) sealing the composite food portion within the flexible film, wherein the composite food portion is cohesive and manually removable from the flexible film as the composite food portion.

61.-62. (Cancelled)

63. (Previously presented) A fluid fill process using a vertical form and fill machine for continuously preparing composite food slices comprising nut butter and jelly wrapped in a flexible film, the process comprising the steps of:

- (a) separately preparing each of the nut butter and jelly into fluidic mixtures;
- (b) delivering the fluidic mixture of heated nut butter and jelly to an extrusion location;
- (c) continuously coextruding the nut butter and jelly;
- (e) adding sugar syrup to the nut butter prior to the coextrusion step;
- (f) using the vertical form and fill machine, simultaneously filling the coextruded nut butter and jelly within a tubular web of the flexible film to form a composite food portion, forming the tubular web into a slice-shaped form, and longitudinally sealing the tubular web using one or more longitudinal sealing bars to form a hermetic longitudinal seal;
- (g) sealing the tubular web at cross sealing locations to form hermetic cross seals, wherein differential water activity of the nut butter and the jelly within the tubular web is less than about 0.5; and
- (h) cooling the tubular web either before or after cross-sealing of the tubular web to thereby provide hermetically sealed food slices wrapped and hermetically sealed within the flexible film, wherein the nut butter and jelly within the composite food slices maintain their individual product identity and are cohesive and manually removable from the flexible film as composite slices.

64. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 63, wherein continuously preparing composite food slices comprises preparing the food slices such that while at ambient room temperatures, the food slices have sufficient cohesiveness so that they can be manually removed from the flexible film while substantially retaining the textural and shape characteristics of a food slice.

65. (Canceled)

66. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein using the portion control method comprises measuring the expansion or contraction of the tubular web of film that is caused by the amount of nut butter and jelly present within the tubular web.

67. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 66 further comprising using an electric motor controlled by a variable frequency drive to control the amount of nut butter and jelly introduced into the tubular web.

68. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 67 further comprising using a linear variable differential transformer, wherein motor speed changes depending upon a sensed voltage, the sensed voltage fluctuating with expansions or contractions in the tubular web.

69. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 21, wherein using sensing mechanisms comprises using a bubble control device for controlling the amount of nut butter and jelly enclosed in the tubular web.

70. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 40, further comprising the step of adding sugar syrup to the nut butter prior to the extruding step but after substantial mixing has occurred.

71. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, wherein using a portion control method comprises adjusting the relative amount of the nut butter and jelly within a the composite food portion.

72. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 14, wherein combining the nut butter and jelly into a composite food portion using a portion control method comprises varying an extrusion speed based on an amount of the food portion present.

73. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 72, wherein using a portion control adjusting the relative amount of the nut butter and jelly within a the composite food portion.

74. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 73, wherein using one or more divider plates comprises moving at least one of the one or more divider plates to permit an adjustment in the relative amount of the nut butter and jelly within a the composite food portion.

75. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of cooling and then flattening the nut butter and jelly.

76. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 75, wherein cooling and flattening the nut butter and jelly occurs after the nut butter and jelly are enclosed within the tubular web.

77. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 75, wherein the cooling step comprises using cooling water.

78. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 40, wherein adding sugar syrup to the nut butter comprises adding corn syrup.

79. (Previously presented) The fluid fill process of Claim 63, wherein adding sugar syrup comprises adding corn syrup.

80. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 40 further comprising forming jelly including a gum to enhance gel formation of the jelly.

81. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 80 further comprising adding sugar to disperse the gum.

82. (Previously presented) The process of Claim 81, wherein adding sugar comprises adding sugar syrup.